

The embodiments of the invention in which an exclusive property or privilege is claimed are defined as follows:

1. A computer-readable medium storing computer-readable data organized in a tag-based data structure for communicating update metadata corresponding to a software update to an update service node or a client computer, the data structure comprising:

an UpdateIdentity element used for uniquely identifying the software update;

zero or more Properties elements for storing general properties relating the software update;

zero or more LocalizedPropertiesCollection elements for storing content directed to a computer user relating to the software update;

zero or more Relationships elements for storing relationships the software update has to other software updates;

zero or more ApplicabilityRules elements for storing rules for determining the applicability of the software update to a client computer;

zero or more Files elements for storing information describing information relating to the software update's payload; and

zero or more HandlerSpecificData tags for storing information for the update handler for installing the software update's specific type.

2. The tag-based data structure of Claim 1, wherein the tag-based data structure is an XML data structure.

3. The tag-based data structure of Claim 1, wherein the elements of the tag-based data structure, if present, are included in the update metadata according to the above-described order.

4. The tag-based data structure of Claim 1, wherein the UpdateIdentity element includes a unique identifier sub-element that uniquely identifies the software update, and a revision number sub-element identifying a revision number associated with the software update.

5. The tag-based data structure of Claim 1, wherein a Relationships element includes a prerequisite sub-element that identifies a second software update that must be installed before the software update installed.

6. The tag-based data structure of Claim 5, wherein the Relationships element includes a plurality of prerequisite sub-elements identifying a plurality of software updates joined together with boolean operators into a logical statement, such that the evaluation of the logical statement determines the suitability of the software update for installation on a client computer.

7. The tag-based data structure of Claim 1, wherein a Relationships element includes a bundle sub-element that identifies a plurality of software updates that must be installed coextensively.

8. The tag-based data structure of Claim 7, wherein the plurality of software updates in the bundle sub-element are joined together with boolean operators into a logical statement, such that the evaluation of the logical statement determines the suitability of the software update for installation on a client computer.

9. The tag-based data structure of Claim 1, wherein a Relationships element includes a supercedence sub-element that identifies at least one other software update that is superceded by the software update.

10. The tag-based data structure of Claim 1, wherein a Relationships element includes any number of prerequisite sub-elements that identify other software updates that must be installed before the software update installed, bundle sub-elements that identify a plurality of software updates that must be installed coextensively, and supercedence sub-elements that identify at least one other software update that is superceded by the software update.

11. The tag-based data structure of Claim 1, wherein a Files element includes information identifying the software update's payload for patching existing files on a client computer.

12. The tag-based data structure of Claim 1, wherein a Files element includes information identifying the software update's payload for replacing existing files on a client computer.

13. The tag-based data structure of Claim 12, wherein a Files element includes information identifying the software update's payload for both patching existing files on a client computer and replacing existing files on a client computer.

14. A computer-readable medium storing computer-readable data organized in a tag-based data structure for communicating update metadata corresponding to a software update to an update service node or a client computer, the tag-based data structure comprising:

an UpdateIdentity element used for uniquely identifying the software update;

zero or more Relationships elements for storing relationships the software update has to other software updates; and

zero or more Files elements for storing information describing information relating to the software update's payload.

15. The tag-based data structure of Claim 14, wherein the tag-based data structure is an XML data structure.

16. The tag-based data structure of Claim 14, wherein the UpdateIdentity element includes a unique identifier sub-element that uniquely identifies the software update, and a revision number sub-element identifying a revision number associated with the software update.

17. The tag-based data structure of Claim 16, wherein a Relationships element includes a prerequisite sub-element that identifies a second software update that must be installed before the software update installed.

18. The tag-based data structure of Claim 17, wherein a Relationships element includes a plurality of prerequisite sub-elements identifying a plurality of software updates joined together with boolean operators into a logical statement, such that the evaluation of the logical statement determines the suitability of the software update for installation on a client computer.

19. The tag-based data structure of Claim 16, wherein a Relationships element includes a bundle sub-element that identifies a plurality of software updates that must be installed coextensively.

20. The tag-based data structure of Claim 19, wherein the plurality of software updates in the bundle sub-element are joined together with boolean operators into a logical statement, such that the evaluation of the logical statement determines the suitability of the software update for installation on a client computer.

21. The tag-based data structure of Claim 16, wherein a Relationships element includes a supercedence sub-element that identifies at least one other software update that is superceded by the software update.

22. The tag-based data structure of Claim 16, wherein a Relationships element includes any number of prerequisite sub-elements that identify other software updates that must be installed before the software update installed, bundle sub-elements that identify a plurality of software updates that must be installed coextensively, and supercedence sub-elements that identify at least one other software update that is superceded by the software update.

23. The tag-based data structure of Claim 16, wherein a Files element includes information identifying the software update's payload for patching existing files on a client computer.

24. The tag-based data structure of Claim 16, wherein a Files element includes information identifying the software update's payload for replacing existing files on a client computer.

25. The tag-based data structure of Claim 24, wherein a Files element includes information identifying the software update's payload for both patching existing files on a client computer and replacing existing files on a client computer.